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AUTHOR Duhamel, Ronald J.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

For a number of reasons, among them decreasing school enrollments, professional staff at all educational levels are tending to stay longer in positions of responsibility. The main objective of this study was to explore the idea of "term" appointments for positions of administrative responsibility in education. Fifty school systems in Ontario were randomly selected, and 42 of these boards responded to the request for information. These respondents represented Boards of Education and Separate (Catholic) School Boards, large and small, English and French, as well as urban and rural constituencies. Of the 42 respondents, 25 indicated that they have no term contracts, while 17 indicated that they do. Contracts with specific terms ranged from involvement only of the chief executive officer of the school system to, in one instance, every single administrative position. The most common term of appointment was of a three- to five-year duration. There is often a probationary period of an appointment for a specified period of time, at which point the appointee is confirmed on a permanent basis. It would appear that the more senior the position, the longer the term of appointment. The advantages and disadvantages of term appointments are discussed. (Author/MLF)

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TERM APPOINTMENTS - AN IDEA WHOSE TIME HAS COME

by

Ronald J. Duhamel
Regional Director of Education
Eastern Ontario Region

Gerald A. George
Education Officer
Curriculum Branch
Toronto

and

Michael F. Cyze
Education Officer
Eastern Ontario Region
Ottawa

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R. J. Duhamel

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TERM APPOINTMENTS - AN IDEA WHOSE TIME HAS COME

SPECIAL ASSIGNMENT TEACHERS, HEADS, CHAIRMEN, SUPERVISORS, PRINCIPALS, SUPERVISORY OFFICERS...

The main objective of this study is to explore the idea of "term" appointments for positions of administrative responsibility in education. As used herein, a position of responsibility means any administrative position in an elementary school, most often a vice-principalship or a principalship, or an assistant headship of any department in a secondary school or any post beyond these particular levels; it includes special assignment teachers, heads, coordinators, chairmen, supervisors, vice-principals, principals, as well as supervisory officers. Of course, and perhaps needless to say, it is recognized that special assignment teachers are individuals who may or may not have administrative responsibilities; yet, this group should be included because they often undertake new challenges which frequently have administrative dimensions.

In an attempt to reach the above objective, we randomly selected 50 school systems in Ontario, and 42 of these boards responded to our request for information. These respondents represented Boards of Education and Separate School Boards, large and small, English and French, as well as urban and rural constituencies.

For the purpose of this investigation we decided that a term appointment would refer to an appointment usually of one year or more. Occasionally, the expression "term contracts" is used more or less synonymously with "term appointments". The only real distinction which has been noted between the two expressions is that "term

contract" usually means a written contract, often without any stipulation for continued employment with the same employer; "term appointment" often has no special term contract and often has an understanding that the employee can return to another position with the employer, most frequently until the employee decides to leave the employer.

Not too many years ago it was not only possible but probable that a well-qualified graduate from a teacher training institution could anticipate a career which would offer an ever increasing share of administrative responsibilities. The upwardly mobile career educator could look forward, after a number of years in the classroom, to becoming a vice-principal or a principal, or at least a department head, or an associate of some kind. Eventually he/she could aspire to a superintendency or perhaps even a directorship of a school system. If he/she were willing to relocate, advancement was almost assured. This assurance of advancement, however, seems no longer to be the case.

It is becoming increasingly evident that for a number of reasons, among them decreasing school enrolments in most school systems, professional staff at all levels are tending to stay longer in positions of responsibility. As well, of late, more professional educators seem to seek more and more personal fulfillment outside the profession. They seem content to remain where they are, much more so than was the case only a few years ago. There may also be another factor in operation. There is evidence that educators are

appointed in certain administrative positions, for example, the chief executive officer's role, at a younger age than they ever were before, on the whole, and may therefore be "holding" positions for longer periods of time than they would have in years gone by. In any case, for whatever reasons, there is no longer as great a turn-over in most teaching or in most administrative positions in most areas of this province.

Assuming that there is in fact as little mobility as suggested above, one might at this stage legitimately ask "so what?" What might be both the advantages and the disadvantages of minimal change of personnel in administrative positions?

First, lifetime administrative contracts for some people may prevent others from contributing to the organization as much as they would have had they been given an opportunity to assume an administrative role. While some individuals would argue that one can still contribute or provide leadership outside a formal administrative role, most people would agree that one could probably provide more administrative leadership within a formal role.

Second, wider involvement of more people in the administrative decision-making process is generally advantageous to the organization and to the persons within that particular organization. It could be argued that this approach would foster a greater sense of commitment to the organization as well as a greater sense of satisfaction for the individuals within the organization.

Third, lifetime appointments, whether they be stipulated in contracts or be what actually occurs, may in fact have contributed

to an unwanted degree of security which can become disfunctional in regard to one's personal and professional growth. It could be argued that too much security is not helpful to the organization, to the individual himself/herself, or to the people with whom he/she interacts.

Fourth, lifetime contracts may remove the motivation or desire for advancement, not only from the people occupying various roles but also from those who might aspire to such roles. There have been a number of people who have indicated that the present situation regarding administrative contracts has contributed to a loss of morale among ambitious educators who see themselves as upwardly mobile, but who feel limited by the present system.

Fifth, it may happen that a person who was best for a particular position when selected does not necessarily remain best as societal and organizational changes occur. There are new people with whom he/she has to interact; society has changed; the system within which one operates has also changed; the clients may be totally different; but the person has not necessarily changed to the same degree or in the same direction that the other key factors and actors have. Therefore, it must be recognized that a new actor for a particular position at another period in time might be better for everyone concerned.

Sixth, it may be argued that the higher the position of responsibility, the greater the pressure to remain within that position. If this is so, for certain people, there may be an unnecessarily damaging effect on one's health, both mental and physical. It might be well

to cultivate the idea that to leave a position of responsibility does not mean that the individual has not been successful. On the contrary, it may be that the person has been more successful than the individual who is unwilling to recognize that he/she has made a major contribution and that it is now time for others to do the same.

Seventh, it may be that the present system does not provide sufficient incentives for people not only to upgrade themselves but also to make sure that they are as current as possible. Could a different approach, perhaps one involving term appointments,ensure that the various actors within a variety of positions of responsibility remain in a state of constant competition for their own posts?

A serious consideration of a system using term appointment might eliminate many of the preceeding negative forces. There are also some aspects regarding term appointments which could be termed dysfunctional which should be pointed out.

One, term appointments may accentuate the insecurity which a person occupying an administrative position often feels because of job-related tensions and pressures. Two, there is also the possibility that one would tend to administer with the idea that one would want to be reappointed, three, five, or whatever, years later and, rather than do what is right for the system, one might have a tendency or temptation to administer in such a way so as to maximize the possibility of being reappointed. Another important consideration is the economic one. A person becomes used to a certain salary and standard of living. There is no guarantee that if administrative positions were for fixed terms the individual

would retain his/her administrative allowance; there are, however, examples where the administrative salary is red-circled until the new position's salary catches up. On the other hand, should a "retired" administrator continue to have an administrative allowance when it is no longer earned? In times of restraint especially, it is more practical and probable that the person, if he/she were to leave a position of responsibility, would return to his/her former salary, thereby requiring possibly an adjustment in living style. If one recognized initially the possibility of having to "move back", then one could take that feature into consideration in budgeting and planning for future years.

If a system of term appointments were to be implemented, how many administrative positions in Ontario might be involved?

In the 1975-76 academic year, there were 115 public School Boards and 57 Roman Catholic Separate School Boards in Ontario. Enrolments in public School Boards ranged from 6 pupils with 2 teachers to 58,348 pupils with 3,247 teaching staff. Roman Catholic Separate School Boards reported enrolments as low as 54 pupils with 3 teachers to a high of 90,876 with 4,200 teachers. These figures have changed very little during the last year. During the 1976-77 school year, there were 92,226 individuals with teaching certificates employed in school systems in Ontario: 56,772 at the elementary level and 35,454 at the secondary level. The following section indicates the administrative positions included in the elementary teaching positions:

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Elementary Principals, Public Schools	-	2,548
Principals, Roman Catholic Separate Schools	-	1,275
Elementary Vice-Principals, Public Schools	-	1,188
Vice-principals, Roman Catholic Separate Schools	-	360
Chairmen and/or Department Heads, Public Schools	-	591
Chairmen and/or Department Heads, Roman Catholic Separate Schools	-	368
Sub-Total		6,330

At the secondary school level the following administrative positions were reported:

Principals	-	551
Vice-Principals	-	796
Department Heads (includes assistants and associates)	-	6,862
Sub-Total		8,209
Total		14,539

The above figures concerning positions of responsibility do not include special assignment teachers. Additionally, in 1976/77, there were 1,426 supervisory officers working in Separate School systems and in Boards of Education.

In very approximate terms then, there is one administrative position for every 5 or 6 teaching positions. Therefore, as far as the numbers are concerned, there are a sufficient number of administrative positions to allow every teacher who wishes to occupy a position of administrative responsibility at least once in his/her professional career to do so. Such an opportunity could be provided if a system such as term appointments were to be introduced.

With information secured in our survey of Ontario boards, two sub-objectives of considerable importance can be explored: First, where do term appointments exist, and what administrative positions are involved? Second, what are some of the key characteristics of these term appointments?

It was noted that some boards indicated quite clearly that they do not, at this time, have any term appointments, nor do they anticipate any in the near future. At the other end of the spectrum, there were boards who had, according to their understanding of this concept, several positions and felt that this was a trend that was going to develop in the very near future. They were actively seeking additional information on the topic.

There were, as was mentioned, 42 responses to our 50 requests. Out of the 42 respondents, 25 indicated that they have no term contracts, while 17 indicated that they do. Contracts with specific terms ranged from involvement only of the chief executive officer of the school system, to, in one instance, every single administrative position.

It should be noted that some term appointments were for probationary periods only. For example, in one case the appointment was for three months before being made permanent. In another situation, the appointment was for one year before the board decided whether or not the position would become permanent.

The most common term of appointment was of a three to five year duration. In our sample, it was noted that in almost every single conceivable administrative position of which we could think, there was at least one example of a term contract. Often the term

appointment was quite simple: there was a stated probationary period following, in cases of successful performance, a permanent appointment. There were examples where chief executive officers, superintendents, assistant superintendents, principals, and vice-principals had term appointments; there were also examples where heads of departments and their associates, consultants, coordinators, supervisors of all types, including special assignment teachers and resource teachers, held term contracts.

It must be emphasized that in spite of the figures which have been quoted, the term contract is not as popular as might have been expected: most boards which use term appointments or contracts usually do so with a few positions only, and often with only one. Some boards have gone into it rather extensively but the majority have not. There is also evidence that there are more term contracts at the less senior administrative positions than there are at the most senior positions. Of course, this observation might be explained simply because the former are more numerous than the latter. However, if one were to take the number of actual term contracts in each role and calculate the percentage in relationship to the whole, the most senior staff, particularly directors of education, would probably have the highest percentage of such contracts.

One of the key features of term contracts as studied has already been mentioned but, because of its frequency, it should be mentioned again: there is often a probationary period of appointment for a specified period of time at which point the appointee is confirmed on a permanent basis. What little evidence was available

on this item suggests that a great majority of probationary appointments, perhaps more than ninety-five per cent, are eventually made permanent.

There are some other characteristics of term contracts which are interesting to note. It would appear that the more senior the position, the longer the term of appointment. In some cases the appointment can be re-extended or re-confirmed. There is no evidence that positions are re-advertised so as to attempt to ensure that the best possible person is in fact given an opportunity to apply for the position in question when it comes up for renewal. Of course, this mechanism may be in place, but in our sample, there was no proof of it. One might be tempted to conclude therefore, that all things being equal, a re-appointment is almost guaranteed.

It appears critically important that positions released by term appointment, at least theoretically, ought to be re-advertised so that all individuals who might qualify might be given an opportunity to be selected. Without that particular opportunity, then, what exists is what might be labelled "term appointment in perpetuity".

SUMMARY OF DATA FOR TERM APPOINTMENTS

Position of Responsibility	Director or Asst. Director	Superintendent	Assistant Superintendent	Coordinator	Consultant	Principal Secondary	Principal Elementary	Vice-Principal Secondary	Vice-Principal Elementary	Head	Assistant Head
Number of Term contracts in sample	11	7	1	3	7	1	2	2	2	3	1
Number with probationary period	1	2	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
Average length of probationary period (Years)	1	1	0	¼	¼	1	1	0	0	0	0
Average length of term contracts (years)	5	5	5	3	3	0	1	4	1	4	4
Number with provisions for extension of contract	4	2	2	1	2	0	1	2	3	3	1
Evidence of advertisement at end of term	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	1

Number of Boards with no term appointments - 25
Number of Boards with term appointments - 17

TOTAL = 42

In conclusion, we suggest that there are definite merits in having each and every position of responsibility re-advertised on a regular basis so that every individual who is qualified might be given an opportunity to be selected for that particular role. Such a practice would permit infusion of additional talent into administrative roles more frequently, and systems would thereby be enriched. Re-advertisement with a subsequent search would also ensure that if the incumbent were selected to fill a second or third or more terms, that the particular individual would be re-appointed because he/she continues to be considered the best person for the role; in other words, the person would have received another vote of confidence for his/her continuance.

What would be the most adequate length of time for an individual to serve in a particular role is an issue that has to be debated by the various systems who are interested in becoming more involved with term contracts. There have been several suggestions that the ideal period of appointment probably ranges between three to seven years. The role being filled is no doubt a crucial variable to be considered in such a decision, as are the major tasks which the person would be employed to complete. However, the crucial issue here is not necessarily the length of the appointment, but the idea that the role would be opened for competition on a regular basis and that everyone who so wished and was qualified to do so, might apply.

The idea of administrative appointments for a fixed period of time is not a novel one. There are a number of organizations in the world who in fact operate with term appointments or contracts.

University and college presidents usually are on term contracts. A number of senior people in industry are given term appointments. For those who have had some experience with sports it will be recognized immediately that some of the key administrative positions in hockey, football and others are in fact term appointments, where continuance hinges on success.

At the present time, in Ontario education, the concept of 'term appointment' or 'contract' is receiving increased attention and discussion. This paper has attempted to encourage and advance the dialogue which is occuring, and to stimulate additional thought about the concept.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The assistance of the Boards listed below is gratefully acknowledged. While this list of contributors is provided as evidence, care should be taken in avoiding unnecessary solicitations from the Boards in connection with this study.

Thank you.

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Brant County Roman Catholic Separate School Board
Cochrane-Iroquois Falls Board of Education
Cochrane-Iroquois Falls Roman Catholic Separate School Board
Dufferin-Peel Roman Catholic Separate School Board
East Parry Sound Board of Education
Espanola Board of Education
Haldimand Board of Education
Haldimand-Norfolk Roman Catholic Separate School Board
Halton Board of Education
Hamilton Board of Education
Hamilton-Wentworth Roman Catholic Separate School Board
Hastings County Board of Education
Huron-Perth County Roman Catholic Separate School Board
Kapuskasing District Roman Catholic Separate School Board
Kenora Board of Education
Kent County Roman Catholic Separate School Board
Kirkland Lake District Roman Catholic Separate School Board
Lakehead District Roman Catholic Separate School Board
Lambton County Board of Education
Lanark, Leeds and Grenville County Roman Catholic Separate School Board
Lennox & Addington County Board of Education
Lincoln County Board of Education
London & Middlesex County Roman Catholic Separate School Board
Manitoulin Board of Education
Metropolitan Toronto School Board
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Toronto Board of Education
Waterloo County Roman Catholic Separate School Board
Wellington County Board of Education

A submission was also received from

Mr. C.H. Prézeau, Principal,
Northern Lights Secondary School,
Moosonee, Ontario